

The Bonfire Boys

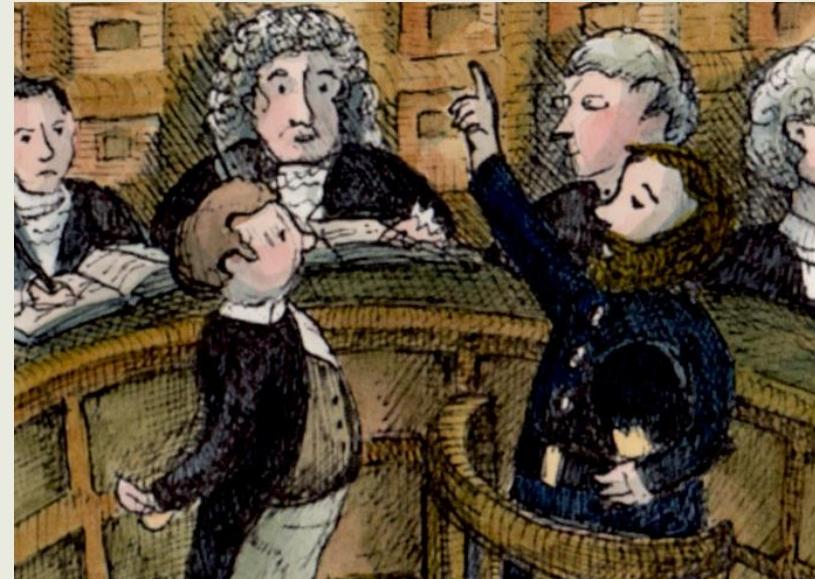
Police Statements

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Every November 5th
in Lewes, Sussex, a spectacular
"Bonfire Night" takes place,
with torches, fireworks, music and
elaborate costumes.
Thousands of people attend.

The tradition began as a
commemoration of the 1605
Guy Fawkes gunpowder plot, and hit
a crisis point in 1847 when eight
Bonfire Boys were sent to prison for
causing a riot.

My ancestor John Stanbridge
and his brother Thomas
were among them.



Officer Flanagan

I was on duty with several other constables in the High Street in Lewes. We were stationed at the foot of Saint Ann's Hill.

We had not been there long before I heard a very loud shouting of men, and I saw a lighted tar barrel which was being drawn down the street by several men who were making a great noise and disturbance. There were at least fifty persons with it, much of them had sticks.



One man was running in front of the barrel carrying a pick axe. He had a night cap over his face. Several other men were following the barrel and were joining in the noise.

I went towards the man who was in front with the pick axe, and said to him, "Now leave off, this won't do."

He came towards me with the pick axe in a menacing attitude, and I struck him with my staff and knocked him on one side of the road.

I then rushed among the mob who were nearest to the tar barrel and apprehended the prisoner Gosnay.

On my way to the Station House, Gosnay slipped his hand from the hand cuff and ran away but after a short pursuit I recaptured him.





Inspector Bennett

I followed the man whom I had seen in front of the barrel and arrested him about 40 yards up the street and struck him.

He had a white cap drawn over his face with holes for his eyes and mouth. He wore a striped Guernsey Frock and a leather belt round his waist studded with pieces of tin in the form of stars.

I took him to the Station House and searched him and found upon him the printed hand bills which have been in my possession ever since.

Officer Page

I was struck violently on the head with a long bat by one of the men--I believe by the prisoner Ashby, but I am not quite certain.

I was stunned for the moment and on recovering myself I took Ashby into custody.

I told him I believed he was the man who struck me. He denied it and said he had only just come from Brighton.



Constable Stubberfield

I took the prisoner Jesse Fold against Mr. Funnell's shop at the foot of the street. I struck him with my staff and threw him on the ground.

He said, "Don't hurt me." Superintendant Harper came up and placed the handcuffs on him.

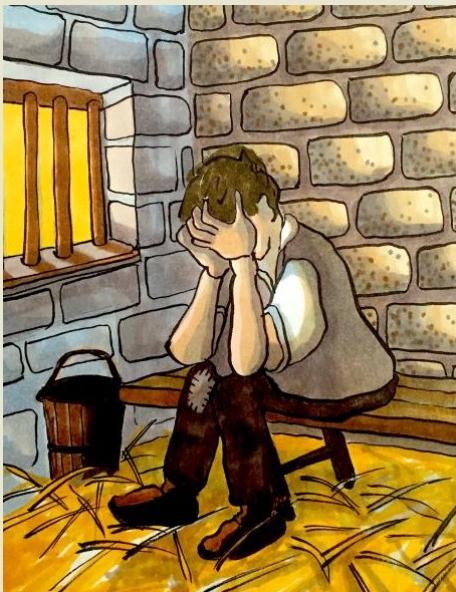
Sergeant Akehurst

I observed the prisoner [Jesse] Fold amongst the crowd. I also saw the prisoner Thomas Stanbridge, whom I apprehended.

The prisoner John Stanbridge then came up and said, "If you take my brother, you shall take me, for I'll be d—d if he shall go alone."

I gave him in charge to one of the constables.





Afterword

John Stanbridge's brother was sentenced to
six months hard labour,
and John was sent to prison for a month.

Ten years later, his wife gave birth to
a daughter named Charlotte.
Charlotte was my great-great grandmother.
She was born on
November the 5th.

"Remember, remember, the fifth of November!"

SOURCES

“England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892” [database online] Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 9 July 2011), entry for John Stanbridge, date of trial 20 March 1848, sentenced to imprisonment; citing The National Archives of the UK, Home Office: Criminal Registers, Middlesex and Home Office: Criminal Registers, England and Wales, series HO 27, piece 86, page 276.

Brighton Gazette, November 4 and 11, 1847, and excerpts transcribed from the *Sussex Express* of November 13, 1847. With sincere appreciation to Jim Etherington, of the Lewes Historical Society, August 2011.

“Spring Assizes, Home Circuit, Lewes, March 23,” *The Times* (London), 24 March 1848, page 7, cols 4-5.

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Excerpt from *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 23 October 1847, transcribed by Jim Etherington of the Lewes Historical Society and kindly provided via email, August 2011.

